

The chat with Craig Bartlett from November 1st, 2002, at 7:00pm EST

1. <Kaeli> What is your contact address?

<CraigB> Write me at Cartoon Network, 300 N. Third St. Burbank 91502.

2. <DukeNukem> Can you tell us something about The Jungle Movie? You know, is there any plot yet?

<CraigB> Yes, I've written several drafts, actually, so I can tell you this much: Arnold goes to Central America to find his parents, and he gets to go by winning an essay contest, so the whole class gets to go, hence Helga as well, Mr. Simmons, Principal Wartz.

(It was asked why the Journal episode would air without a chance of seeing TJM, and Craig had this to say about it: Nick paid for the Journal, and we made it, so they'll air it. They don't care if it sets up another story that may or may not get made. I'm glad that the Journal ends with Arnold wanting to go to Central America, because what the heck, maybe it will cause enough people to demand The Jungle Movie. If you check out Nick Online, I'm instructing the kids to write and ask for it. I don't know, but Rugrats came back on air because they got sacks of mail. Don't write emails, of course.)

3. <DakotaK> So Craig, how'd you come up with the concept of Monkeyman?

<CraigB> We thought of Monkeyman when we were making the pilot, in 93!! The main thing was he was crazy; had a kind of Tourettes, so he keeps saying "Monkeyman" in mid sentence. I love him. Sometimes I do his voice. Yeah, my bosses didn't want a Monkeyman ep so I waited until they were fired.

4. <QAtheTenkou> Um....what shampoo does Arnold use?

<CraigB> Which shampoo? It has no name, we could make one up. HA Official Shampoo, that's good. Kind of Herbal Essence. Kind of spicy. I thought Helga sniffing Arnold's pillow was great. I wrote that one. We did the "hair smells good" joke about three times.

5. <pixiecc> Who was your inspiration for Helga?

<CraigB> Well, she's all the girls I loved and didn't love me back and vice versa, and the name is sort of "Hell girl". The ones who strangled me in the playground, had strong personalities, and secret other lives.

6 <Gennaisback> What the heck does Madam Fortress Mommy mean?

<CraigB> Justin Shenkarow actually made that up on the spot once. He is a very talented and funny guy. We played it back, said, "What the hell did you just say?" Justin's all, "I dunno." No meaning whatsoever. We started writing it into all his scripts, and Justin couldn't even remember saying it.

7. <Ruth> Well, mine was about the similarities between Penny and Helga. I wondered if you liked Penny so much that you used her for Helga or if you had a thing for little blond bullies.

<CraigB> Wow, Ruth, right on. Penny was first, and when I created Helga, I wanted a kind of 'Evil Penny', so she's like her evil sister, but then I fell in love with Helga; she's not evil at all. It's like I discovered it as I wrote it. The pilot Helga's dress was exactly like Penny's if you notice. Nickelodeon said her dress was too old fashioned, I remember, and I said, "So what?"

(For those that don't remember or are too young to remember, "Penny" was from Peewee's Playhouse that aired throughout the late 80s-early 90s. It was a set of claymation shorts that Craig did when he first got started in the business. Penny was a little blond-haired girl with pigtails and pennies for eyes.)

8. <rhondawlloyd> Okay, so if The Jungle Movie can't be in theaters or on TV, is there any possibility of it being made into a book?

<CraigB> What an interesting idea. Since I know the whole story, why not? What will have to happen is, I have to wait on Nick to decide Arnold's fate. If they want to do more stuff, they will call me. If they don't, after a while I could propose new stuff that I did on my own, I guess. I know you want to know what happens, and I would like to do it too. Yeah, and of course the most important part is Arnold's response to what Helga said in the first movie. I have to finish that, it's like a shoe that must drop!

9. <Suik> Alrighty, give me favorite medium and the best you've done with it.

<CraigB> Wow, my fave medium? Well, watercolor and prismacolor is my current fave, together, on rough paper, like arches. I like the stuff I'm doing now, cause I'm better than I used to be, but I still like the medium of good ole animation.

10. (This question was asked out of turn, but Craig answered it, and people might be interested to know.) <Rinku> How long exactly does it take to make ONE episode of a cartoon?

<CraigB> About nine months to make a half-hour cartoon. We used to overlap like crazy tho. I'm doing another hour of Party Wagon; it'll take a year. It's due next November.

11. <TheAngel144> So, if you don't get The Jungle Movie in a book, or something legal....can you maybe put it up on the board or something?

<CraigB> Well, the script is still controlled by Nick, since they bought it, so legally, I can't.

12. <DaChinyere> How did your casting crew find Jamil...and were you not able to find a replacement for him? Just wondering about your relationship with him and stuff.

<CraigB> I remember we found Jamil when we found Franny. They were both tiny. Jamil was, I guess, 11; Franny was 9. Jamil contributed so much to his character. We cast and cast, but no one was Gerald enough. I couldn't replace Jamil, but I replaced Arnold again and again. It seems to make no sense, but Arnold needs a young, innocent sound, and Gerald is more of a "character." It was awful when Sid finally went down, but we had Sammy's brother! Sam contributed so much to Sid, his crying jags. We would think up a premise that would get Sid to fall apart in Act Three.

13. <aurorawolf> Can you elaborate a bit on the real-life turtle rescue mission you mentioned in the Nick.com chat?

<CraigB> Yes, I was working for Will Vinton as an animator, and my friend, Joan Gratz, bought the turtle from a stinky pet shop in Seattle, brought it back to Portland, where she tried to cheer it up, but it was super depressed so she thought, "What the heck, maybe it's dead," so as a last resort, we took it out to Square Lake, on Sauvie's Island outside of Portland where we set him down on the mud, and his little head came out...this is after not moving for two weeks, mind you...and ZOOM! he shot out into the lake! We all jumped up and down and cheered. It was so cool, hence the ending of "Field Trip."

14. <Auzzie717> Ok...what was your favorite and least favorite subject in school that wasn't Art?

<CraigB> Um...favorite was History, but not when I was little, more like when I was older. My son, Matt, loves Math, doesn't give a hoot about History.

15. <snowlane> Were there any lines (other than the one from Operation Ruthless) that Nick made you cut?

<CraigB> Other lines that were cut...yeah, all our off color stuff. We always would write nasty stuff. Well, you know, there are always funny, but too dirty punchlines, that we would pitch when we were all working in the room. I

remember that "Synchronized Swimming" was a riot; we laughed until we cried as we punched that one up. I liked incredible stimulation. That one was mine. You know, the deal is this: Nick catches stuff and makes us take it out, but they missed a lot, as you noted. Death USED to be a taboo, but then they kind of didn't care anymore, so then we said it a lot--dead, death. The Summer Love show is full of crazy innuendo. Kath Soucie came up with hilarious adlibs for Carlos, but we had to cut 'em.

16. <Pop> What's up with Harold and Rhonda or Harold and Patty situation?? In the end, who is destined to be together?

<CraigB> Well, Rhonda is too tense for Harold. She would try to make him into somebody he can't be, so I think he should go for Patty. We had a Rhonda and Robert story [and] Sid wants Ruth.

17. <Jessica> Okay, when did you first start drawing?

<CraigB> When I was 3, cause my folks kept the drawings. They were of Pinocchio characters, i think. I loved that movie, the underwater stuff really stayed with me.

18. <Ayla> Okay....what drew Brainy to Helga, exactly?

<CraigB> Brainy is the quiet one, that watches from the back of the class. He sees Helga for who she really is. He knows pretty much all her secrets, and he will keep them for her. What can i say? I'd like her, too. Sure, he knows all about the Arnold thing. It's a measure of how cool Brainy is that he won't stand in their way. He even helps in The Jungle Movie. The Jungle Movie has the greatest Brainy scene ever. He doesn't say much, but...he helps the story along in a really cool way. Well, in the middle of the story, Helga is fed up. She gives up completely, and Brainy kind of helps her back to life. It's a really cool moment, and I'd rather animate it than explain it.

19. <DrBliss> What the most important thing for an animation student to learn?

<CraigB> This may sound crazy, but I think in this biz it's more about personality than talent. You have to get along with people! It's so collaborative. We have an expression about artists who have no social skills, "raised by ducks", and it applies to so many artists who can't be in a group at all. So work on your ability to listen and relate, plus of course draw, draw, draw. That's it!

20. <HelgaGP820> I have the entire Hey Arnold book series and I noticed that four of the books aren't based on episodes from the T.V. Series. Were these suppose to be episodes or where they just ideas that you came with just for the book series?

<CraigB> Yeah, we wanted to do all original stories but did eps as well, just to meet the production needs. Plus, some stories just make good books, like the X-mas ep. and Parents Day. Kind of the ones that I thought had a lot of meaning that I'd like kids to read and understand Arnold's heart. He's a good kid, and those stories put it across. The original stories would make good eps. I'd love to do E-files cause it's a Brainy ep. [to Spike345] We put Rimbaud quotes in the book to make you laugh. I guess cause he's a zen boy. I always said "Arnold is a little Buddha". He's pretty zen, but Arnold's little Buddha would be different. [so i take it that from E-files that Helga will dye her hair black, wear black clothes, and become a goth?] Well, in "The Pataxis," she's still a blond, just kinda goth in spirit. Yeah, Fran had a goth phase, but when we called her a goth, she'd always get mad.

21. <Goldenoses> Okay. Are there any new characters that are going to be introduced in the future eps or the Jungle movie?

<CraigB> When you all see the Journal you'll meet (very briefly) a villain named Lasombra. He's a big character in TJM; Mom and Dads' nemesis He's a guy, a mercenary treasure hunter and river pirate. [He] goes in disguise. In the Journal, we spend a lot more time with Eduardo. Here's the deal: Nick wanted us to do a prequel for the movie because at that time, we were in preproduction for TJM. So we said, "Crap! A prequel?" but had to do it, so I said: let's set up some stuff. Like, who exactly is Eduardo, and why did Mom and Dad have to leave Arnold? So much of the hour is

spent showing what good people all three of them are, their friendship, and their personal debt to "the green eyed people." Grandpa: "Yes, the mysterious green eyed people. Almost as mysterious as this sandwich! What's in this, pookie?" Pookie: "Peanut butter and scrod! It's an old family recipe!" Scrod is like cod. So now that we've done it, I'm glad. You get to spend a lot of time with Mom and Dad, and they're cool.

22. <Peapod_Kid> What's Peapod Kid's first name (Big surprise)?

<CraigB> He has no name! It came from his costume of course from Downtown As Fruits. He's actually a legume, but Clint Bond, who drew the model, called him Peapod Kid on the model sheet hence, Peapod Kid.

23. <Peapod_Kid> You say Arnold and Helga get together. Do they have kids?

<CraigB> Yeah, I've not gotten that far, but I love the kid fantasy in "Married" so, yeah, bring 'em on! [That was] a Rugrats spoof, like little Angelicas.

24. <Peapod_Kid> I know you went to college, worked on Penny, got hired by Nick.... What exactly did you do pre-Arnold?

<CraigB> Well, it went like this: after Penny, I knew that I needed to do cel animation, or I'd run out of work. My friend, Paul Germain, was over at Klasky Csupo, and he called me in. That story editor job at KC was like a miracle. I had no writing experience, really, but they hired me cause they liked my clay shorts, Arnold and Penny. Once I was a writer/story editor at Rugrats, I met all the Nick execs, and after a long while pitched Arnold to them. Ta-da! I had some miraculous breaks here in H'wood. [I remember Graham Canyon.] Graham Canyon was kind of my big opus that year. I boarded it too, and I suck at Math! When I visit kids in schools, I tell 'em they even have to know Math to animate. Mostly I tell 'em to read and write tho.

25. <Nadine> Aside from Brainy, what sort of roles did Arnold's classmates have in the jungle movie?

<CraigB> The thing I wanted to do that we didn't do in the first movie, was give the other chars their own scenes. So Rhonda and Nadine have a subplot, and Harold, Stinky, and Sid...and Eugene is jinxing it up like crazy getting allergic attacks. Harold does his usual bullying stuff with Stinky and Sid. "I'm the boss and I say we're doin' it!" Rhonda totally freaks out in the jungle, but Nadine is in heaven. "There are 20,000 species of spider in San Lorenzo" Yeah, Eugene nearly is eaten by piranhas, etc. His legs puff up like balloons.... "I'm okay..." Helga throws Brainy overboard a couple of times. Act Two they're on a boat. I pitched it as Heart of Darkness to Paramount, and they were all.... "Heh...." Heart of Darkness is my fave 20th century myth, like Captain Willard, goin' up to kill the colonel. Hot stuff!

26. <InvaderKrag> Alright. When creating Party Wagon, did you make it in the same light atmosphere as HA!, or did you change it around? Also, what other differences are there?

<CraigB> Party Wagon is a western, so it's set 150 years ago, and that's a big change from Arnold, but the humor is sort of the same cause I make things funny in my own stupid way; things that make me laff. One of the things I love about early America is the way they talked, and that's a big part of PW. Mark Twain is the best for that; Huck Finn is such wonderful English. It was a big influence. So if Arnold is about a Buddhalike kid in a big city, PW is about a 16-year-old who runs away from his shotgun wedding and escapes out west. He meets a bunch of characters, all slackers and losers, and they make a story! I want PW to make fun of white people, and make fun of America cause they could use it! It'll take another year! Cause I'm doing the next hour, it'll be a TV movie. [Hmmm, is Party Wagon gonna be on Adult Swim?] Nope, it's supposed to be for all ages now. Adult Swim is too late. No one would see it. So I'm okay with this new decision

27. <Chief> Did you ever think about incorporating other minor characters into the storyline when you were making Hey Arnold! episodes, kinda like you did for Iggy? Did you think about writing an episode on Sheena, Joey, Park, or even Robert?

<CraigB> Yes, to all of them. Cause after 3 or 4 seasons, you start looking further around. Like I said earlier, we were

gonna do a Robert ep. Rhonda wants to "make" Robert into somebody, but he doesn't want to come out of the shadows. It's about Rhonda playing God with the Fourth grade.

28. <RockDivaStar> Why are so many characters that we don't see around anymore, like Gloria, Tucker and Torvald?

<CraigB> Yeah, but they were kinda "one ep" types. Except Torvald. I would like to do another with him.

29. <Ayla> Hm....Craig, April Fool's Day hinted to Helga's birthday....do you have an exact date?

<CraigB> No, we don't! It must be a week before April First, tho.

30. <snowlane> And do you have a date for Arnold's by chance?

<CraigB> Didn't he say "the Seventh"? How 'bout October? Good month. Nice colors. [I figured it being Dec. 7th would be more interesting, near Christmas.] But December 7 has a bad connotation too, Pearl Harbor day, and the day they kicked me out of Nick.

31. <Nftnat> I'm guessing you especially put yourself in characters you voice, like Brainy or Ned; am I right?

<CraigB> Yeah, I like to hide in the characters a little. I wrote myself a good part for Party Wagon because I want to be in every ep this time. Romeo Jones, the fiddle playin' fool. Romeo's kinda dense. He's illiterate.

32. <Liina> Craig, I have a question, do you play an instrument?

<CraigB> Guitar, ukelele...I played the guit on Simple Things and that song at the end of Road Trip.

33. <RockDivaStar> Craig, what kind of music do you like?

<CraigB> I'm really into "Musette" right now, cause of that France trip. Accordion based Pop from the 20s and 30s. Party Wagon has cool music, Mr. Lang of course, tho I play gittle on the theme song. [Jazz? Or Bluegrass-like?] Well, it's very... unplugged. Guitar, banjo, mando, fiddle...we listened to the Pogues and of course "Oh Brother Where Art" which was a great record! You will love the music for PW.

34. <Auzzie717> If we were to show up at the studio would you let us in?

<CraigB> Sure.

35. <Rook> What's your fave cartoon, other than yours?

<CraigB> My boy, Uncle Matt, and his wonderful Simpsons, the best cartoon of all time.

At this point, Craig had to leave, but he left some words for everyone.

<CraigB> So, remember, watch that dang Journal and write to Herby and say "IT'S THA BEST SHOW EVR IT'S AWSOME ETC!!!!" Pretend you are nine. You all are the best.